




City of Portland

Office of the City Council
1221 SW 4th Ave. # 110
Portland, OR, 97204

 CouncilorNovick

 @CouncilorNovick

503-823-4360



Councilor Novick Shares Balanced Budget Amendments to Restore Parks Maintenance and Bolster Emergency Management

May 7th, 2025

Today, Councilor Steve Novick announced plans to introduce certain amendments to Mayor Wilson's proposed budget during upcoming budget discussions. The amendments will be a balanced offering, with proposed increases in funding offset with proposed cuts elsewhere.

Councilor Novick will look to restore at least some funding for outdoor parks maintenance, which took the brunt of Mayor Wilson's proposed cuts. Novick also hopes to address frightening deficiencies in the City's capacity to prepare for and respond to complex emergencies, such as a Cascadia subduction zone earthquake – deficiencies that could cost thousands of lives.

Novick will recommend paying for his proposals through savings to be realized by ceasing to send armed officers to "welfare checks," which simply do not require an armed response, and by reducing the Council's office budgets, except that of the Council President.

Details on each priority are listed below:

Parks Maintenance: A priority for Portlanders and essential for the future viability of Portland's parks system.

Novick said "I am concerned that Mayor Wilson focuses his cuts on Parks, specifically outdoor parks maintenance. Services affected include removing hazards - such as hypodermic needles, broken glass, and offensive graffiti - restroom cleaning, trash pickup, maintenance of sports fields, and playground repairs. That's not in alignment with Portlanders' priorities."

A recent scientific poll commissioned by Council President Elana Pirtle-Guiney and Councilor Novick showed that Portlanders would rather cut police and community centers than parks maintenance. In addition, Former Parks Director Zari Santner pointed out that if you start letting maintenance go it becomes much more expensive to restore the parks to their prior condition down the road.

Novick would like to restore at least \$3 million of the over \$6 million in cuts to parks maintenance. Priorities for restoration could include a five-person Utility

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Work Crew, Seasonal Maintenance Workers in each service zone, litter and trash pick-up on Sundays, materials for playground repairs and installations, and more.



Linked is a [spreadsheet of the mayor's proposed cuts to Parks maintenance](#) and [narrative descriptions of the impact of the cuts](#) based on conversations with Parks staff.

Portland Bureau of Emergency Management: Prioritizing emergency preparedness and resilience.

The Portland Bureau of Emergency Management (PBEM) is charged with preparing for and managing responses to complex emergencies. Having previously served as the Commissioner in charge of the bureau, Novick was keenly interested in the status of the Bureau, and was distressed to find that PBEM is currently starved for resources for essential functions, “which is not a good idea for any city, let alone a city that lives in the shadow of the earthquake.”

“PBEM currently doesn’t even have 24/7 capacity,” Novick said. “If disaster strikes during the night, they have to depend on someone in BOEC or another bureau to wake up the on-call PBEM duty officer before they can learn what is going on, formulate messaging, and issue an alert.”

Novick would like to see additional staff for 24/7 watch command and emergency planning and other items to make progress toward ensuring PBEM is adequately staffed to achieve the outcomes we expect from them. The mayor’s proposed budget takes a first step in bolstering PBEM’s capabilities by providing funding for a Citywide Incident Management System (CIMS) software but does not provide for a staff person to conduct ongoing management of the system.

Linked is [PBEM’s description of the nature and purpose of the resources](#) Novick would propose to add.

Welfare Checks: An inefficient use of armed officers.



Armed police officers serve a unique and essential role in our public safety system and should not be used for purposes that could be served by unarmed personnel – which are significantly cheaper.

The Portland Police Bureau (PPB) told the Community and Public Safety Committee that 9% of their calls and 6% of their time is spent on “welfare checks.” The Bureau of Emergency Communication (BOEC) provided Novick with a list and description of the different categories of ‘welfare checks,’ which is reproduced below. “None of these require an armed response, other than

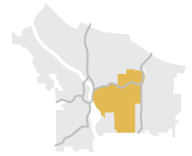


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possibly the last, very rare category – where the Psychiatric Review Board has revoked a patient’s release,” Novick said. “The other categories could all be handled by Public Safety Support Specialists (PS3s), who cost a third less than armed officers, or by Portland Street Response (PSR).”

Savings could total \$3 million, which Novick said is a conservative estimate. “The police have told us that welfare checks represent about 9% of police calls and take up 6% of police time,” Novick said. “6% of the police budget is about \$18 million, so saving 1/3 of that amount would amount to \$6 million. But Chief Bob Day has said that because of certain fixed costs, a percent reduction in calls does not automatically translate to the same reduction in staffing needs, so I am accounting for that.” Novick also acknowledged that “a shift in responsibility for welfare checks from armed officers to other public safety responders would be subject to bargaining,” but hoped the police union would recognize that sending armed officers to welfare checks “makes no sense, regardless of the state of the budget.”

The same recent scientific poll of 600 city residents by DHM Research, referenced above, showed that Portlanders are very open to the idea of ceasing to send armed officers to ‘welfare check’ calls.

Novick said that “to be clear, I would rather not cut the overall police budget. In fact, if we had the money, I would like to add officers to establish a new burglary investigation unit. But I don’t think Parks should bear all of the cuts, and shifting welfare checks to unarmed personnel is a common-sense way to save resources.”

Types of Welfare Check Calls

- **Occupant Welfare Check:** A person has not been seen by or in contact with relatives, neighbors, friends, or employer, AND This behavior is unusual and/or there are other suspicious circumstances (mail stacking up), AND BOEC is unable to confirm there is a patient, AND The person requesting the welfare check is unable to check on the person or access the residence.
- **Person Welfare Check:** A person appears unable to care for self AND there is no indication medical assistance is needed
- **Missed Medical Appointment:** Provider has exhausted all avenues to reach the patient and their emergency contacts, AND Provider believes there is immediate danger of physical harm or death OR there are other circumstances indicate the patients welfare may be compromised.
- **Person Down and Checked On:** A person on a sidewalk, street, park, or other area that is conscious and appears unable to care for themselves.

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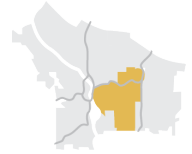
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Portland – PSR is sent whenever available; PPB is sent when PSR is not available.



- **Person Down and Unchecked:** Portland – PSR is sent whenever available; PPB is sent when PSR is not available
- **Psychiatric Review Board Revocation:** A person has not followed the check-in procedures with the Psychiatric Review Board or has had their status revoked for some other reason.

Council Office Budgets: Adjusting budgets to Council's actual needs.

In January, members of the City Council voted 10-2 to increase office budgets, allowing each Councilor to have an additional staff member and a larger discretionary office budget. Novick believes budgets could be right-sized by reducing each office budget by \$300,000 – excluding the Council President – which would net a total of \$3.3 million.

“I voted against expanding Council office budgets in January believing it was not the right time to do so. We did not yet know what the job would require and knew that the rest of the city would be facing cuts,” Novick said. “I now know for certain that our offices do not require the level of resources this Council approved.”

Councilors were originally provided \$306,798 for the half year of Fiscal Year 2024-25 which included funding for Councilors, one Senior Council Aide, Internal Materials and Services (IMS) and External Materials and Services (EMS). The Council voted to allocate funding for an additional Senior Council Aide position as well as an additional \$261,677 EMS funds for the remainder of the Fiscal Year 2024-25. The mayor left those appropriations whole in his proposed budget, meaning each Council office currently has a total Fiscal Year 2025-26 budget of \$1.6 million. “I gotta say, I believe we can get by with less,” Novick said.

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